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# WISCONSIN NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

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January 23, 2008

Senator Fred A. Risser, Chair  
Committee on Ethics Reform and Government Operations  
220 South, State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator Risser and Members of the Committee:

The Wisconsin Newspaper Association appreciates this opportunity to comment on 2007 Senate Bill 203, and strongly urges this committee to reject it. SB 203 would result in unintended consequences of shifting important local governmental decisions from public view into little-known, seldom-visited Web sites. While large established companies that regularly secure local-government contracts may make it a matter of routine to visit government Web sites to check on postings of new bid solicitations, this proposal puts the average citizen in the dark and small "mom-and-pop" businesses at a distinct disadvantage in securing contacts in the range of \$5,000 to \$25,000.

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Current law provides that bid solicitations be published in a newspaper of record. That requirement gives information about government actions and decision-making the widest possible dissemination among the citizenry. It is unrealistic and illogical to expect the public to regularly check a local-government Web site at the end of the work day or work week for a bid-let update. We don't imagine small businesses would have much time for this, either.

Consider also that it is government's responsibility to inform its constituents about its activities – emphatically, it is improper to expect that individual citizens should have to seek out information on their own. The Internet certainly has its purposes and regular users – but but it is wrong to force average citizens week-after-week, month-after-month, year-after-year to maintain their own vigil on the actions of their local governments. This bill should be rejected.

Sincerely,

Peter D. Fox  
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To: Senate Committee on Ethics Reform and Government Operations  
From: Curt Witynski, Assistant Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities  
Date: January 23, 2008  
**Re: Support for SB 203, Allowing Municipalities to Solicit Bids for Public Construction Contracts on the Municipality's Website**

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities supports SB 203, allowing local governments to solicit bids on public construction projects on their Web sites rather than in the newspaper.

A couple of summers ago, the League surveyed its 578 members on the cost of publishing legal notices. We received responses from 368 municipalities for a response rate of 63%. Responding municipalities reported spending a total of \$2.033 million on publishing legal notices in 2003.

This bill will provide local governments with a potentially less expensive method of soliciting bids on public construction projects. It allows municipalities to invite bids on public construction projects by posting the bid request on the community's Web site rather than in the newspaper. If a community chooses to solicit bids for public contracts exclusively on its Web site, it must notify the public of this fact by publishing a notice in a newspaper twice a year.

This bill could also be viewed as the first step to the possible creation of a single Web site where all local governments may advertise for bids on public works projects. A single repository for local public works project advertisements would enhance competition, reduce costs and increase efficiencies.

SB 203 is a simple bill that provides municipalities with more flexibility in conducting municipal business. In light of the levy limits included in the state budget, municipalities need such flexibility now more than ever.

Thanks for considering our comments on this League initiated bill.